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ABSTRACT

Christian humanism programs initiated in 1978 at the following four colleges are described: The College of St. Catherine , St. Paul, Minnesota: Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, and St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. One of the principal features of the program is the introduction of new courses in Christian humanism. All of the colleges offer a Christian humanism course that deals with education and especially with the history and humanistic heritage of the local college itself. A second feature of the program is joint activities, often in the form of Christian humanism festivals, or smaller-scaled gatherings of students and faculty members from all four colleges on one campus. Additionally, faculty seminars have been hosted to disseminate information about the program to a large number of colleges. A third program feature is the preparation of publications. A text of readings has been produced for use in the classroom in the fall survey course dealing with the western tradition in Christian humanism. An overview of the development of the programs and the persons responsible for organizing committees and meetings is presented. Much of the preliminary conversation sought to bring together the points in common shared by the four colleges, two in the Roman Catholic tradition and two in the Lutheran tradition. Similarities in background and characteristics of the colleges, in addition to being colleges of the church, are noted. The argument is advanced that Christianity has always maintained a positive interest in human beings and their welfare, and that it is a distortion of western history to define humanism as intrinsically at odds with Christian teaching. Some information on implementation and results of the program are presented. (SW)

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FOUR-COLLEGE CHRISTIAN HUMANISM PROGRAM

The College of St. Catherine
Luther College
St. John's University
St. Olaf College

by Joseph M. Shaw
St. Olaf College

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Description

A Christian Humanism program was begun in the fall of 1978 by four upper Midwest colleges, The College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, Minnesota, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, and St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota.

The program has three principal features. The first consists of new courses in Christian Humanism introduced at the four colleges. The titles of the courses vary. At. St. Olaf the fall course, which offers a survey of the tradition of Christian Humanism through western history, is called "Humanism and the Christian Tradition." In the spring, all four colleges offer a Christian Humanism course which deals more specifically with education and especially with the history and humanistic heritage of the local college itself. During the January Interim term, the four colleges have sometimes cooperated in a number of joint activities, bringing students from different campuses together for discussions and some socializing. The January Interims offered at St. Olaf in 1979 and 1980 were "How Christian is Humanism?" and "Humanism and the Bible." Luther and St. John's nave centered their Interim Humanism courses around the discussion of novels.

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The second feature of the program may be described as joint activities, often in the form of "Christian Humanism Festivals" or smaller-scaled gatherings of students and faculty members from all four colleges on one campus. The original conception called for one major festival at each college, following the sequence of the Church Year: Fall: All Saints/Reformation; Spring: Easter. The scheme worked at the beginning. A large-scaled festival was held at St. Olaf College in the fall of 1978 on the weekend of All Saints/ Reformation. As the colleges took their turns in hosting festivals, however, scheduling problems forced the planners to use whatever dates were available.

All of the colleges have been active in promoting and implementing the festivals, though it is a matter of record that Professor Bill Franklin, project director at St. John's University, has organized and hosted more special events on that campus than the other project directors have. The problem experienced by the four project directors has been the logistics of housing students at the host campus. Even more difficult is the problem of recruiting a sufficient number of students to attend a festival on another campus. The conclusion that is being formed in the minds of the project directors is that the festival idea may have seen its best days.

More workable have been the early summer faculty seminars. The first one took place at St. John's University in June of 1979 and the second at Luther College in June of 1980. Alston Chase was the featured speaker in 1979; Philip Haefner in 1980. In each case, the host project director invited colleagues from dozens of the private, liberal arts colleges of the Upper Midwest and from more distant parts of the country. The guests hear lectures by the main speakers, and also learn about the Christian Humanism program, asking questions and offering suggestions. Through these faculty seminars

information about the Christian Humanism program has been disseminated to a large number of colleges.

The third feature of the Christian Humanism program is the preparation of publications. The first publication is a book of source readings entitled Readings in Christian Humanism; publication is set for 1982 by Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis. This publication has evolved from a joint effort to produce readings for use in the classroom in connection with the fall survey course dealing with the western tradition of Christian Humanism. The four project directors, working together each summer since 1978, developed a book of readings which was made available to students in xerox form. The intention in getting the book published is to make available the materials to a wider circle of colleges and universities.

An original part of the publication phase was the plan to produce a book of biographical sketches based on the lives of important "Christian humanists" associated with the four Midwest colleges. For the time being, that aspect has not been pursued. Tentative plans are in place to produce a small, informative book on Christian Humanism which could reach persons who would not be inclined to purchase the larger book, Readings in Christian Humanism.

Origin of the Program

The Four-College Christian Humanism Program began with the initiative of Professor Bill Franklin of St. John's University who, on the suggestion of officers at the National Endowment for the Humanities, sent letters to several Upper Midwest church colleges sounding out deans and professors on their interest in planning a joint proposal to NEH. The colleges responding became the other three collaborators, the College of St. Catherine

represented by Charles Buzicky, professor of history, Luther College by Harris Kaasa, professor of religion, and St. Olaf College by Joseph M. Shaw, professor of religion. These three and Professor R. William Franklin of St. John's became a working committee which agreed to meet in order to plan a suitable joint program for which funds would be sought from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Under the chairmanship of Professor Franklin, a series of exploratory meetings were held on the various campuses in 1977 and 1978. Dr. Edward Lindell, then president of Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, met with the committee as consultant. Advice from the National Endowment in the latter part of 1977 led to a hurried change from a single, joint proposal to the submission of four separate but coordinated proposals. The title given to the proposed program was "Humanism in an Age of Limits: A Christian Perspective." The proposals submitted by St. John's University and St. Olaf College were approved by the NEH in the summer of 1978, with the College of St. Catherine and Luther College receiving smaller grants. The following year the latter two colleges received full support from NEH. The program at all four colleges was begun with the introduction of the course on Humanism and the Christian Tradition in the fall of 1978.

Purpose of the Program

The theme of "Christian Humanism" for the four-college project did not occur to the committee until considerable discussion had been held concerning the state of higher education in the United States, the condition of the humanities generally, and the unique nature of the colleges of the church. Much of the preliminary conversation sought to bring together the points in common shared by the four colleges, two in the Roman Catholic

tradition and two in the Lutheran tradition. It was not simply that all four were colleges of the church; there were other similarities in background and character.

All four had a clearly identifiable immigrant history which meant that significant, sometimes subtle features of European culture were retained in the perspectives of the founders and their successors. All four had enjoyed close to a full century of successful service to students, church, and society. All four retained a serious interest in modern European languages. All four colleges had a vision of higher education as a means whereby students could become better prepared to serve the needs of their fellow humans. And all four shared in the educational aim of achieving a satisfactory integration of faith and learning. On all four campuses existed a long tradition, not of authoritarian indoctrination of students, but of affirming and interpreting the Christian faith as a positive, pro-cultural view of human existence. The ideal continually sought was an educational pattern in which students would see and appreciate the profound interrelationships between the central meaning of Christianity and all of the liberal arts disciplines.

The four-person planning committee thus found itself moving toward a new program which would re-emphasize for this generation of students the colleges' long-standing commitment to the tradition of Christian Humanism. It was believed that rapid changes in the direction of scientific technology were causing many colleges to lose sight of the humanistic tradition in general and, more specifically, of the fact that Christian faith and thought had contributed significantly to the development of humanism in western culture.

The conviction emerged that these four colleges of the church had a serious educational responsibility, not only to themselves but to higher education, to give a fresh articulation of the enduring relevance of the tradition of Christian Humanism. The state colleges and universities could not be expected to do so; it seemed to be the special obligation of colleges which had a century-long experience in keeping faith and learning together to provide a clear and public expression of what is meant by humanism seen from a Christian perspective. In re-emphasizing Christian Humanism, the four colleges also aspired to offer a corrective to the secularistic assumption that humanism is at the opposite pole from Christian faith. In the courses and in Readings in Christian Humanism the argument is advanced that Christianity has always maintained a positive interest in human beings and their welfare, and that it is a distortion of western history to define humanism as intrinsically at odds with Christian teaching.

Implementation and Results

The Christian Humanism program, supported by a total of approximately $250,000 in grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, is now in its third and final year. This is not the place for statistics; the new courses have been offered fall and spring at the four colleges and the January Interim has usually been devoted to studies in Christian Humanism. It would be safe to say that well over 1,000 students have been directly involved in the courses, and at least 5,000 others affected by public festivals and lectures.

The impact of the program has, of course, varied from one campus to another. Because of the fields represented by the project directors, the impact has been felt more in the history departments at the College of

St. Catherines and at St. John's University, and in the religion departments at Luther and St. Olaf. But through guest lectures, field trips, discussions, and festivals, an interdisciplinary influence has been achieved. For instance, at St. Olaf College the students in the Christian Humanism courses have heard and seen presentations by an expert on John Milton, a member of the Order of St. Benedict, Professor Franklin from St. John's on the liturgical movement, a musician lecturing on J.S. Bach, a historian of American religious movements, and an art historian. In April of 1981 Dr. Martin E. Marty gave three public lectures at St. Olaf on topics directly related to Christian Humanism and the Humanities.

The four colleges are committed, according to the terms of the NEH grants, to continue to offer the new courses. There will be a measure of continued cooperation among the four project directors and their colleagues, especially in publication of books and articles dealing with Christian Humanism.